



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Required Report - public distribution

**Date:** 2/21/2007

**GAIN Report Number:** PL7011

## Poland

## Biotechnology

## The Conference About Biotech In The Polish Parliament

## 2007

**Approved by:**

Ed Porter  
U.S.Embassy

**Prepared by:**

EP/nk

---

**Report Highlights:**

The Polish Parliament recently held a biotech conference that highlighted the strong anti-biotech bias in the Polish government. But, it also offered an opportunity for farmers to demand they be permitted to use biotech crops. Their comments support Post's position that Polish farmers are the key to eventual cultivation and acceptance of biotech products in Poland.

---

Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
Warsaw [PL1]  
[PL]

On February 15, 2007, the Polish Senate Agricultural Committee and the Ministry of Environment organized a conference titled "GMO – A Chance for the Development of Polish Agriculture? – Facts and Myths". Representatives of Sejm and Senate, as well as regional and local authorities, scientists, non-governmental organizations, farmers, and journalists were invited to participate.

Five speakers spoke forcefully against biotech. The Minister of Environment Szyszko, long a biotech opponent, spoke against biotech use in agriculture and food processing and advocated a very cautious approach towards biotech research. The possible harm biotech use could cause to Polish biodiversity was his main argument. Asked about the Rospuda Valley case, he said the valley was created by humans 30 years ago and has the potential to regenerate after the highway is completed. (The GOP has approved highway construction through a nature reserve, despite EC warnings that the project violated EU environmental obligations and a growing local opposition.)

Several other speakers who spoke against biotech did not appear knowledgeable about the issue. For example, some said that biotech products caused obesity and diabetes in highly developed countries like the United States. Some claimed that biotech foods cause cancer. They also argued that biotech products are unhealthy while organic products are very healthy and said that organic production is the future of Polish agriculture. They also claimed that only the biotech companies are doing research, so it is not surprising that the results are always positive. Regional authorities from Poznan and Warsaw said they have banned biotech cultivation at the request of their constituents and accused the USDA of not undertaking thorough research. The Greenpeace representative presented a box containing signatures from EU citizens opposed to biotech.

Farmers argued forcefully for the right to use biotech crops. They explained that corn borer and rootworm infestation in Poland is spreading so fast that biotech is the only acceptable choice farmers have, if they want to remain in business. (Reportedly, 30-50% of cornfields are infested with the corn borer or rootworm.) They said they could use more chemicals, accept lower yields, stop farming and start importing corn from neighboring countries, such as Germany and the Czech and Slovak Republics, immigrate to those countries to earn a living, or use biotechnology. Representatives from the Institute of Plant Breeding and Acclimatization and the National Corn Producers Association said that the corn borer also is a threat to organic farmers. Farmers insisted that they should have the right to choose what they grow and said that they would be willing to accept strict regulations, if that is what is required to grow biotech crops in Poland. They also requested that the government support biotech research.

The Ministry of Health representative said that there is no proof biotech foods cause any harm to human health. He said that diabetes and obesity are caused by our way of life, lack of exercise and poor eating habits. He did note that in some cases, biotech products can cause allergies, but pointed out, so can other products, and that we should not generalize.

(Comment: The conference was billed as an opportunity to discuss the future of biotechnology in Poland. But, from the list of speakers, it is clear that it was organized to provide a forum for biotech opponents to influence elected officials prior to an upcoming vote on new biotech legislation. Nevertheless, some scientists and farm representatives were able to present some strong arguments in favor of biotech use in Poland. The comments from farmers were especially interesting and give hope that farmers can influence the final decision. Interestingly, media coverage was not very impressive.)